

'A patriot for Duxbury'

Clipper Publisher David Cutler
remembered for humor and heart

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A community newspaper icon and one of Duxbury's most tireless champions, David S. Cutler, died on Sunday after a battle with cancer.

"Nobody loved Duxbury as much as David Cutler," said Jane Lane, who worked with Cutler at the Clipper and other papers.

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David Cutler: 1945-2010

Clipper publisher succumbs to cancer at 66

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Cutler was only seven years old when his parents, John and Roberta, started the Duxbury Clipper on their dining room table. But it sparked a lifelong passion for journalism, and community news in particular, that would lead him to publish dozens of newspapers across Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Connecticut. From the beginning, Cutler showed an aptitude for the written word.

"David's writing was so incredible. He was always right on the mark," said Paula Maxwell, who worked with Cutler as the managing editor of the Clipper during the 80s and 90s. "He could get right to the nub of the issue; he had such a way with words."



Cutler and his wife Catherine Cullen (center), surrounded by their blended family at their home on Surplus Street. Cutler enjoyed spending time with his family and especially his seven grandchildren.



All his life Cutler maintained a strong connection to Duxbury, especially Duxbury Bay, where he loved to fish for stripers.

After college, Cutler worked as a beat reporter for the Patriot Ledger, eventually becoming the paper's State-house reporter. In 1972, he and a business partner, Michael Stearns, started the Marshfield Mariner. The Mariner group grew over the years, and it included 17 weeklies when it was sold to Capital Cities/ABC in 1989. He later founded, with Capital Cities/ABC's John Coots (who was his immediate boss at the Mariners), Stonebridge Press, which operates papers in Central Massachusetts and Connecticut, and Salmon Press in New Hampshire. Cutler was elected to the New England Press Association Hall of Fame in 2004.

Cutler, who had no formal journalism or business training, had an impact on scores of young journalists throughout his career.

"He filled that role of mentor for literally hundreds of young writers," said Lane. "I think that's what he loved so much."

Of course, Cutler's presence could be intimidating. Such was the case for an aspiring freelance journalist, Walter Bird, who was told he'd have to interview with the publisher of the Southbridge Evening News in late 1998. Bird was initially nervous, and when Cutler asked his trademark question "What was the last

book you read?" all he could think about was reading the children's classic "Goodnight Moon" to his daughter. Cutler burst out laughing, and Bird not only got the job but eventually became the paper's executive editor.

"Everything I learned about journalism, I learned from David," he said. "We became really close. He became more of a friend than an editor."

Cutler imparted his core ideas about community journalism to Bird.

"He taught me that the news doesn't happen at your desk," Bird said. "Community journalism is just that, it's being out there. It's about pictures, getting people in the paper — it's about covering the community, not just writing about it, but being a part of it."

Lane remembered the personal interest Cutler took in the people that worked for him.

"David got to know everybody's family, whoever worked for him," she said. "He loved to talk about everybody's family. That's what made it such a special place to be ... There was nothing phony about David Cutler, he was genuine."

"He was a very good guy to work for," said David Mittell, Jr., a long-time friend. "He was a master of being frank and direct ... yet he was kind, honest and considerate."

Cutler also had deep ties to his hometown, through the newspaper his parents founded as well as other groups and committees. Recently, Cutler lent his talents to help make the World War I monument a reality, organizing the fund-raising and donations.

"We always looked forward to his making the meetings," said Joe Shea, chairman of the war memorial committee. "He was quite willing to take whatever piece of responsibility we gave him. He didn't shirk from anything."

Shea said Cutler felt a special connection to the monument project as a veteran himself.

"I think there's something there you never quite forget when you've served," he said. "I sensed that very clearly in David."

Cutler served in the Marines in Vietnam, where he was wounded in the line of duty while trying to rescue one of his men. For his bravery he was awarded the Purple Heart and a Navy commendation medal. Although he didn't speak much about his time in Vietnam, those who knew him weren't surprised when they learned about his exploits.

"He's always led a noble life," said Maxwell. "He was such a strong person."

Town Manager Richard MacDonald said he appreciated the support he got from Cutler when his decision-making came under fire last summer.

"I was very grateful for that," MacDonald said. "He was a man of principle. He understood the basic fabric of this community ... he's going to be missed by the town and myself."

Former selectman Maggie Kearney, a grammar school classmate of Cutler, remembered how he valued his roots in town and old friendships.

"He was always interested in the other person, it was never about himself it was always about you," she said. "I never needed an appointment to see him ... he was always available. It's a sad loss for our town."

Mittell first met Cutler during an epic tennis match on the courts at the Duxbury Yacht Club.

"It was in the days before tiebreakers," said Mittell. "In the process of getting to 10-all

we became friends."

Mittell later worked for Cutler at the Marshfield Mariner before moving on to the Patriot Ledger and the Providence Journal. He credited Cutler with "dragging him kicking and screaming into journalism."

"I learned from him ... a newspaper can make its community and its town better," Mittell said. "He was passionate about that."

Those who worked for Cutler remembered a man who could hold a conversation about anything, from the Red Sox to international politics, as well as his tremendous sense of humor.

"It was my impression from the start that this was a man who could converse with a president or with someone buying the newspaper at the corner store," said Lane. "He was equally at ease with anyone."

In the past year, Cutler had returned to a more active role at the Clipper, stepping in as publisher when his son Josh left the paper to run for state representative. In a way, it was a return to his roots, helming the newspaper his father started on that dining room table 60 years ago.

"He was a patriot for Duxbury," said Mittell.

See page 11 for details on memorial services.